

We Each Must Strive to be "More Like George"



by [Cecile Richards](#) ^[1], Planned Parenthood Federation of America

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May 31, 2011 is the 2-year anniversary of the assassination of Dr. George Tiller. In May, [Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health](#) ^[23] gave awards to several providers at an event in New York. Remarks by Cecile Richards, President of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, spoke about the political landscape in which providers now work. [All articles in the 2011 series commemorating Dr. Tiller can be found here.](#) ^[18]

Congratulations, Curtis and Eleanor, for your courage, your compassion, and for all you do to provide for women.

You represent our future and you honor the memories of Doctors George Tiller and William Rashbaum and you advance the cause to which they dedicated their lives.

No one knows that better than Jeanne and Rebecca Tiller. Having you both here tonight means so much to us all — seeing you instantly reminds us of George — his kindness, his courage, his wisdom.

George was a remarkable man, a remarkable doctor.

We have a credo at Planned Parenthood developed by the great Lynne Randall — which is that we each must strive to be “more like George.”

More determined.

Braver.

Kinder.

Of course, you are all like George. You care for women regardless of the personal risks, the political climate, the increasing number of restrictions and regulations and pure harassment that you and your patients endure.

I'm humbled and awed to be with you — women and families around the world owe you a huge debt of gratitude. I know I do — as does the entire Planned Parenthood family.

And PRCH plays such a vital role in supporting you — bringing your voice to the table, guiding legislation and public opinion, advocating, educating, and training — and standing by your side as you serve your patients.

You know, George used to say, “If it’s too hot in the kitchen — don’t cook!”

Well, right now, the oven is set to broil!

But George just kept on cooking, no matter how hot it got — and so will we.

The simple fact is that since the November elections, we are living through the most aggressive legislative assaults against women’s health and rights in a generation. From the U.S. Congress to the South Dakota legislature — we are fighting across the country to protect the most basic rights to reproductive care.

I want to talk about that this evening — what we’re facing and how we’re fighting back — but also how we are using this political assault to make ourselves even stronger for the future. And how this next generation — of providers and activists — gives me so much hope for the years ahead.

Just three weeks ago, we saw the House leadership bring the government to the brink of collapse over whether women could continue to get their birth control from Planned Parenthood.

Mind you — we aren’t even talking about abortion services — because for far too many years, the federal government has prohibited federal funds paying for abortion care.

At the 24TH hour, Speaker John Boehner — arguably the third-most powerful man in the United States — called President Barack Obama as we were on the verge of shutting down the federal government — disrupting our entire economy and the lives of millions of Americans.

His demand? To prevent low-income women from receiving preventive health care from Planned Parenthood.

And at that moment, as we now know from the *New York Times*, President Obama had only two words for Speaker Boehner.

“Nope. Zero.”

And Speaker Boehner made the demand again.

“Nope, zero,” said the president.

This is why having a pro-choice president matters.

We went on to defeat this measure in the U.S. Senate, 58–42, with every member of the Democratic caucus and five brave Republicans....

But it doesn't stop there — this is just the beginning.

The attacks in the federal budget on family planning, on Medicaid, on private insurance coverage for abortion keep coming.

And — the assault on women isn't limited to Congress — since January hundreds of measures to restrict access to reproductive health care have been introduced in 49 states:

- forced sonograms
- forced medically inaccurate counseling
- forced appointments with anti-abortion organizations
- three-day waiting periods
- restrictions on abortion providers for the purpose of shutting them down

In short — if the opponents of women can't make abortion illegal — they are determined to make it impossible to access.

If you just read what's going on in Congress, you'd think we had an abortion crisis instead of a jobs crisis.

So along with you — we are fighting back with every tool in our tool kit.

Where we can, we're filing litigation — starting with the state of South Dakota.

We are mobilizing grassroots activists — literally thousands in the state of Indiana — where Governor Mitch Daniels has pledged to sign one of the most restrictive abortion bills in the country — including a complete ban on Planned Parenthood in the state.

Let me tell you, if the politicians of this country think the women of America are going to sit quietly when their health care is attacked, they had better think again!

I will be in Texas tomorrow, where we are battling legislation that would make it impossible for Planned Parenthood to provide health care to 90,000 Medicaid patients.

And the latest — last week, the House passed HR 3 — a sweeping and devastating bill that would make the Hyde Amendment permanent and would forever ban insurance coverage for abortions. We are pushing hard for a presidential veto.

This fight isn't one we picked — but by **God** it's one we are going to win!

The three million women and young people who will come to Planned Parenthood this year are counting on us for more than reproductive care. They are counting on us to fight for their rights and their future — and that we will. As George would say, "The only requirement for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing." And we won't let him down.

But the real message tonight is that there are signs of hope everywhere. Hundreds of thousands of people around the country have come together to rally, to e-mail, and to call their members of Congress. And not just the usual suspects — 825,268 people signed up to fight in Congress against the ban on planned parenthood, and 258,960 of them are under 35, and more than 86,000 of them are under 22.

Kids on campuses are making their own videos — they are organizing their own rallies — and they are traveling to Washington, DC, and their state capitals. Frankly, Mike Pence and John Boehner did what we've been trying to for years: enlist the next generation in the fight for reproductive rights!

But it's not only the next generation of activists that makes me hopeful ... it's also the next generation of providers. At our National Medical Committee meeting last fall, it was so inspiring that the most amazing docs — who've been in the trenches and in the clinics for decades — folks like Cam McIntyre in Seattle and Mark Nichols in Portland — were joined by a whole next generation. Like Dr. Suzie Prabakaran from Sarasota ... Dr. Savita Ginde from Denver ... Dr. David Eisenberg, now our medical director in St. Louis, who first started years ago as a volunteer escort in Alabama ... Dr. Rachael Phelps in Rochester/Syracuse ... and Dr. Willie Parker in Washington, DC — amazing, committed doctors, like all of you here tonight — you are the future!

And they are using new tools and new technology to reach a new generation. PlannedParenthood.org is now receiving 2.6 million online visits a month — women, men, and young people are getting the information they need — 24/7 — with no picket signs, no harassment, no fear.

Or telemedicine, enabling us now in the state of Iowa, to provide medication abortion to patients in rural areas where there isn't a full-time doctor.

We are now in the beta test of a texting program — allowing us to give real-time information and support any time, any place.....

Solutions, not problems!

That's what George would say.

And one big solution is the new generation of support we have found. We may be under attack, but we have found new friends and allies ... everywhere.

When we were in the middle of fighting for the very life of Planned Parenthood, we launched our big pink bus — as an unmistakable sign that we would not back down, would not abandon our patients or our principles. In just a month, the bus traveled through 19 states and 28 communities — across the Midwest, from Geneva, Illinois, all the way to Louisiana and on to Atlanta, Georgia.

In Atlanta, the big pink bus and crew were welcomed one Sunday morning by Reverend Tim McDonald at first Iconium Baptist Church. But it wasn't just any Sunday morning. The sermon that morning was dedicated to remembering the April 4, 1968, assassination of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. And the sermon was also dedicated to Planned Parenthood and the important care we provide every day.

It is for the people that we serve every day that we will continue to engage in the fight for our health centers, our providers, our patients, our supporters ... and our trip to Atlanta, and across the country, was an important reminder — that Planned Parenthood and women's reproductive rights may have powerful enemies, but we have the best friends in the world — and sometimes unexpected ones.

This is our moment to take the tough fights and build for the future — for the millions of women and young people who are counting on us — and we can. As George would tell us, "Attitude is

everything.”

Well, our attitude is – **we shall overcome.**

And we are!

We are meeting the fundamental challenges not just of the American experience but of the human experience:

Basic health.

Knowledge about sexuality.

The power to decide for oneself when and whether to have children.

Just as we were on the big pink bus — we are on a journey together. A journey to a world where women have the right and the means to meet their sexual and reproductive health care needs.

And someday, as we get closer and closer to our destination, we’ll glance in the rearview mirror, and we’ll see today’s battles receding behind us.

And we will tell our children, and our grandchildren, truly it was one of our finest hours.

I’m so proud to share this evening with you — our finest providers and champions.

Thank you.

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